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PONTUS AND ARMENIA, 1914-1922

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The period from 1914 to 1922 was a critical turning point in the history of the Pontus region, which extended from the Chorokh River Valley and Lazistan in the east to beyond Samsun in the west. When in October 1918 the Ottoman Empire surrendered to the Allied Powers in World War I, critical questions loomed about the future of the region and its diverse ethno-religious populations. For the decimated Armenians, Trebizond (Trapizon; Trabzon) and other nearby ports were regarded as essential in the creation of a new nation state with unhindered access to the outside world. With neither firm historic nor ethnographic claims to the coastline and its rugged backing terrain, Armenian spokesmen were to pose strategic and economic arguments in their quest to establish lifelines to the sea. Such aspirations, however, did not sit well with the large indigenous Greek population, the various Muslim elements, and the organizers of the postwar Turkish Nationalist movement.

World War I

The outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 and Turkey's entry into that war as an ally of the German Empire a few months later dashed the last hopes for legal reforms as a way to safeguard Armenian life and property in the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turk government led by Enver, Talaat, and Jemal quickly nullified the internationally-brokered reform project that it had been forced to accept in February of that year and resolved to settle the Armenian Question once and for all by eliminating the Armenian population.

In the city of Trebizond in April 1915, a number of prominent community figures were arrested on the trumped up charge of concealing weapons. Then on June 24 (June 11, Old Style), more than forty

Armenian leaders were sent toward Samsun, supposedly for legal proceedings, but they were ambushed and killed en route. On June 26 (June 13, Old Style), the government issued the official proclamation of deportation of the Trebizond Armenians.¹ Pleas and petitions to rescind the decree or at least to delay its implementation were of no avail. The agony of Pontus had begun. Italian Consul Giacomo Gorrini wrote that the orders came from the central government, a fact that was repeatedly confirmed: "The consular body intervened, and attempted to save at least the women and children. We did, in fact, secure numerous exemptions, but these were not subsequently respected, owing to the interference of the local branch of the 'Union and Progress Committee' and to fresh orders from Constantinople."² On July 1, the first caravan was marched out of the city, followed by the second and third on July 3 and 5. By the end of July, the number of Armenians deported from Trebizond alone reached 10,000. Some of the unfortunate people were loaded on boats and dumped overboard into the sea, while most were marched inland over the mountains toward Gumushkhane. The same occurred in all the Armenian towns and villages throughout the Trebizond *vilayet* and Janik *sanjak*, with only a small number of men escaping to hideouts in the mountains.³

The wartime secret agreements of the Entente Powers (Russia, Great Britain, France) regarding the future partition of the Ottoman Empire reserved for Russia the eastern half of the Armenian Plateau and most of the province of Trebizond. The Russian offensive into these regions in the spring of 1916 led to the occupation of Van, Mush, Erzerum, and Erzinjan (Erznka), while in April of that year General V. Liakhov's divisions advanced into Rize, Surmene, Of, and Trebizond.⁴

¹ See Hovakim Hovakimian (Arshakuni), *Patmutiun Haykakan Pontosi* [History of Armenian Pontus] (Beirut: Mshak Press, 1967), pp. 221-24. This detailed study includes sections on geography, history, urban and rural economy, church and religion, cultural and educational structures, civic and political societies, interethnic relations, and the anti-Armenian persecutions prior to, during, and after World War I, as well as sketches of the main Pontic coastal towns and the Hamshen villages of the interior.

² Great Britain, Foreign Office, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, Miscellaneous no. 31 (1916), ed. Arnold Toynbee (London: H.M.S.O., 1916), p. 291; also in Walker, *Armenia*, p. 216.

³ See the chapter by Simon Payaslian in this volume.

⁴ W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 378-83; E.V. Maslovskii, *Mirovaia voina na Kavkazskom fronte*,

Armenian partisans were then able to descend from the mountains, and many women and children were rescued from Muslim households. This work was supported by Armenian benevolent societies from Russia and the Caucasus.⁵ Eventually many of the survivors made their way to the port cities between Batum and Sochi or on the Crimean peninsula.

Conditions changed rapidly as the result of the Russian revolutions in 1917 and the abandonment of the Caucasus front by the Russian armed forces. Desperate attempts by the caretaker Transcaucasian executive and legislative bodies in Tiflis, the Commissariat and the Seim, to hold on to Trebizond and Lazistan as well as the occupied portions of the Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van vilayets failed. The small Georgian and Armenian contingents that tried to fill the void left by the retreat of the Russian armies were no match for the Turkish armies. At the end of February 1918, while Soviet Russia negotiated for peace with Germany and its allies, Turkish forces reoccupied Trebizond and, after the Soviet government ceded all of Western Armenia, along with Kars, Ardahan, and Batum, to the Ottoman Empire in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 3, 1918), the Turkish army advanced as far as Batum, while other divisions regained all of the Western Armenian provinces and marched into the province of Kars and all the way into parts of the provinces of Tiflis and Erevan.⁶

It was only at the price of Armenian acquiescence in these losses that the Turkish government assented to recognize the tiny Armenian republic that was formed around Erevan and Lake Sevan in May 1918. That fragile state survived under extremely precarious conditions until the Allied victory over the Ottoman and German empires several months later gave it a little breathing room. As the Turkish armies withdrew from Transcaucasia by terms of the Ottoman surrender, the Republic of Armenia was able to incorporate most of the provinces of Erevan and Kars, thereby approaching the prewar 1914 Russo-Turkish border.⁷

1914-1917 g. [The World War on the Caucasus Front, 1914-1917] (Paris: Vozrozhdenie-La Renaissance 1933), pp. 326-30.

⁵ Hovakimian, *Patmutiun Haykakan Pontosi*, pp. 270-83.

⁶ Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Bekreley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 101-05, 121-24, 131-37, 157-66, 174-76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-202, 207-15, 238-42.

The Armenian Republic and the Pontus

The Allied victory in World War I opened new vistas for the Armenian people. The Allied leaders had made numerous pledges about the rehabilitation of the Armenian people and the determination never again to allow the Armenians to be subjected to Turkish tyranny.⁸ Armenians around the world believed that the Allied declarations meant that Armenia would be given protection as an independent or autonomous state and allowed to incorporate the six Western Armenian provinces of Van, Bitlis, Diarbekir, Erzerum, Kharpert, and Sebastia and perhaps even Cilicia and its ports on the Mediterranean Sea.

As the Armenian government at Erevan prepared to send Avetis Aharonian to the Paris Peace Conference to present the Armenian claims, the legislature (*Khorhurd*) defined those claims as the unification of Eastern (Russian) Armenia and Western (Turkish) Armenia with outlets on the Black Sea. Although the Armenians were a minority in the Pontus region, it was argued that economic considerations justified its inclusion in the new Armenian state.⁹ The Armenian claims were contested by the Georgian republic, which had also been created in May 1918 and now declared that the eastern half of Trebizond vilayet—Lazistan—was inhabited by Georgians who had been forcibly converted to Islam and should now be restored to home country.¹⁰ A more serious consideration was that most Pontic Greeks, who heavily outnumbered the Armenians, did not want to live under Armenian rule and sought to restore Greek dominion over the region. Their distinguished leader, Archbishop Chrysanthos, petitioned the Paris Peace Conference for a separate state of Euxine Pontus.¹¹ Of course, the majority of the population there was neither Armenian nor Greek, but

⁸ For examples of British, French, Italian, and American declarations, see Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Allies and Armenia, 1915-18," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3:1 (1968): 45-55.

⁹ Al. Khatisian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutian tsagumn u zargatsume* [Creation and Development of the Republic of Armenia] (Athens: Nor Or, 1930), pp. 97-98; Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, 4 vols. (Los Angeles, Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1971-1996), vol. 1, pp. 250-52.

¹⁰ Great Britain, Foreign Office Archives, FO 608/88, 356/2/2/4366; Délégation Géorgienne à la Conférence de la Paix, *Mémoire présenté à la Conférence de la Paix* (Paris, 1919).

¹¹ FO 371/3659, 110915/512/58; FO 608/82, File 342/8/1; United States National Archives, Record Group 256 (RG 256), Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 876B.00/42.

Muslim, albeit the Muslim population was divided into Turkish, Kurdish, formerly Christian Laz and Hemshin (Hamshen), and other ethnolinguistic groups.

When the Armenian delegates, Avetis Aharonian and Boghos Nubar Pasha (the latter representing the Western Armenians), appeared before the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference in February 1919, they argued for the award of Trebizond to Armenia for the same reasons that the Danzig corridor to the Baltic Sea was being created for the new Polish state. They were encouraged that Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos had made it known that Greece would stake no claim to Trebizond, which he conceded should be included in Armenia to ensure its economic viability. Venizelos was pleased, in turn, with Armenian assurances that the Pontus region would be accorded the broadest possible autonomy.¹²

Although the Armenian pretensions may in retrospect seem highly unrealistic, especially after Aharonian, at the insistence of Boghos Nubar, agreed to expand the Armenian desiderata to include Cilicia, these claims in fact corresponded with the confidential British and American preliminary plans for peace. The British government's Eastern Committee, chaired by Foreign Secretary Lord George N. Curzon, was responsible for making recommendations relating to the forthcoming peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire. The committee called for retention of a Turkish state in Asia Minor but advised that it should extend no farther east than a line from Samsun on the Black Sea to Selefké on the Mediterranean Sea, whereas the areas of mixed population east of the Kerasund-Sivas-Mersina line should be detached and given the "historic name of Armenia." The western border of Armenian state, it was foreseen, would touch the Black Sea somewhere between the ports of Trebizond and Tireboli (Tripoli). An attached map showed Armenia extending from the Black Sea at a point just to the west of Ordu, along the Anti-Taurus Mountains to the Mediterranean coastline of Cilicia. The Eastern Committee later also recommended that Trebizond, Batumi, and Poti on the Black Sea, and even Baku on the Caspian Sea be made into free ports.¹³

¹² Archives of the Delegation of Republic of Armenia to the Peace Conference (Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives), File 104^a/3^a; *The Armenian Question before the Peace Conference* (London, 1919).

¹³ Great Britain, Cabinet Office Archives, Cab 27/37, E.C. 2525, and 27/24, Eastern Committee, 40th Minutes (Annex), Dec. 2, 1918. See also FO 608/83, 342/8/4/7142.

The Western Asia Division of the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference also advocated the separation of Armenia from a residue Turkish state, which should reach no farther east than the Anti-Taurus Mountains. This Division, headed by Professor William L. Westermann, went on to specify that the Armenian regions of Transcaucasia should be combined with the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The western and southern boundaries of the new state (which should be placed under the protection of a mandatory power serving on behalf of the League of Nations) were "fixed by nature"—the Anti-Taurus and Taurus mountain ranges. Thus, Armenia should extend from Cilicia to the Black Sea harbors in and around Trebizond and eastward to Kars, Akhaltsikh, Akhalkalak, and Erevan. It was argued that, in view of the horrific deportations and massacres and the historic injustices done to the Armenian people, a liberal interpretation of the principle of self-determination should be applied in this case.¹⁴

Later, in the summer of 1919, an American field investigation to Constantinople, Cilicia, and Syria-Lebanon-Palestine (King-Crane Commission) expressed concern that the Armenian claims were excessive and violated the principle of majority rule. The commission recommended that, for the sake of the Armenians themselves, their state should be limited to Russian Armenia and those parts of the eastern vilayets that had been occupied by the Russian armies in 1916. This implied that even such a smaller Armenian state should include the eastern Ottoman provinces as far west as Erzinjan and Mush and the Black Sea coastline as far as the city and port of Trebizond.¹⁵

Retreat of the Allied Powers

The realization of plans regarding the future of Armenia and outlets on the sea was dependent on the ability and determination of the Allied Powers to remove the Turkish armed forces that continued to control the interior provinces of the Ottoman Empire. What was more, after a deep sense of pessimism and fatalism had descended over the Turkish leadership at the end of World War I, new life was blown into the

¹⁴ David Hunter Miller, *My Diary of the Peace Conference of Paris, with Documents*, 21 vols. (New York: Appeal Printing Co., 1924), vol. 4, pp. 254-60.

¹⁵ United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, 12 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942-1947), vol. 12, pp. 819-28.

Turkish nation by a military champion, Mustafa Kemal Pasha. Through amazing feats of courage and cunning, he was able to organize a resistance movement whose fundamental purpose was rejection of any territorial concessions to Armenians or Greeks. At gatherings of Muslim notables in Erzerum and Sivas in the summer of 1919, Kemal insisted that the natural frontiers of the Turkish state included all the eastern provinces and the entire vilayet of Trebizond. The Turkish Nationalists would defy all attempts of the Allied Powers to partition the Turkish homeland.¹⁶

Intense rivalries among the Allied Powers and their unwillingness to commit the requisite troops to crush the Kemalist movement led by the end of 1919 to a retreat on the Armenian Question. All the Armenian appeals for the Allies to disarm the Turkish armies in the eastern provinces and repatriate the survivors of the genocide had achieved no positive results. Moreover, it had become clear that the United States would not accept the role of the protective mandatory power for the new Armenian state and would not even participate in drafting the treaty of peace with Turkey. The Americans were turning away from Europe and moving into the era of "splendid isolation." President Woodrow Wilson was unable to persuade the U.S. Congress to grant authorization to assume the Armenian mandate or even to ratify the Treaty of Versailles with Germany, which had been signed in June 1919 and which included the Covenant of the League of Nations with provisions for the assignment of mandates to advanced countries for the supervision and assistance to developing states while they progressed toward the goal of ultimate self-sufficiency and independence.¹⁷

With the United States no longer in the picture, the British, French, and Italian leaders adopted a policy of trying to appease both the official Turkish government in Constantinople and the Kemalist counter-government at Ankara (Angora). They reversed their initial intent to expel the Turks from Constantinople and the last remaining European territories and also conceded that the region of Cilicia should remain under Turkish sovereignty. Armenia, it was decided, had to be cut back in size to take in the existing Armenian republic in Transcaucasia and

¹⁶ See Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 1, pp. 429-38, and vol. 2, pp. 342-44.

¹⁷ See James B. Gidney, *A Mandate for Armenia* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1967); Ralph Stone, *The Irreconcilables: The Fight against the League of Nations* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970).

only a part of the former Turkish Armenian provinces.¹⁸ By the beginning of 1920, the question, in the words of Foreign Secretary Curzon, was whether there should be a “larger” or a “smaller” compact Armenian state.¹⁹

During Allied consultations in London in February 1920, Curzon conceded that the concept of a Greater Armenia with a Mediterranean outlet was no longer feasible.²⁰ The issue now at hand was whether Armenia should have the fortress city of Erzerum and the seaport of Trebizond. He was in favor of giving Armenia an outlet in Lazistan even though most inhabitants there were Muslims of Georgian stock. Furthermore, Batum should be made into a free port. French Foreign Minister Philippe Berthelot suggested that Armenia should follow the example of Switzerland by having guaranteed railway access to and commercial privileges at some port on the Black Sea.²¹

From internal correspondence of the British government, it becomes clear that the British Foreign Office favored the inclusion of Trebizond in Armenia. The reasons were explained in a memorandum by W.S. Childs:

Trebizond in possession of Armenia would make the Armenian state a compact, self-contained, independent economic unit which in self-interest and sympathies would look to us. It would provide a growing source of revenue to the State. It would encourage the growth of a national consciousness in Armenia in a way that no treaty rights of access to Batum or any other foreign port could do. . . . Armenia has neither ethnographical nor historical claims to the Trebizond seaboard, and the inclusion of this district can only be justified on grounds of expediency. But I am confident that the expediency is great, and that the possession of such an historic city of Trebizond—which geographically is the natural Armenian port—would do more for the stability and unity and prosperity of the State than the addition of any other territory whatever.²²

¹⁸ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 2, ch. 13.

¹⁹ *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 1st series, ed. W.L. Woodward, Rohan Butler, J.P.T. Bury et al. 27 vols. (London: HMSO, 1947-1986), vol. 7, pp. 81-82 (cited hereafter as *British Documents*).

²⁰ For minutes of the London conference, see Great Britain, Foreign Office, Secret/General/102/1, International Conference of Prime Ministers, nos. 24-92. These records have been published in *British Documents*, vol. 7, pp. 1-462.

²¹ *British Documents*, vol. 7, pp. 42-43, 81-82.

²² FO 371/4952. E646/58/1.

To study and make recommendations on this and related questions, the London conference formed a committee known as the Armenia Commission. After several consultations and interviews with Aharonian, Nubar, and other interested parties, the commission submitted its recommendations at the end of February 1920. However desirable it was to award Trebizond to Armenia, the commission considered that such a solution was not realistic, because the Armenians had been so badly decimated that they could not possibly populate the area. Strategically, the inclusion of Trebizond in Armenia would have helped to safeguard the approaches to the Armenian Plateau and to make it easier to defend, but for political and ethnographic reasons, this could not be done. The territory assigned to Armenia should be sufficiently compact so that within a short period of time the Armenians would become the majority element. As a safeguard, the land to be left to the Turks should be demilitarized between Trebizond and Tireboli, and all the fortifications at Trebizond itself should be dismantled. Thus, the Armenian boundary would run from the Pontic Mountains at the juncture of the Trebizond and Erzerum vilayets southward to Baiburt, Mush, Sasun, Bitlis, and Van. Armenia's need for access to the sea could be satisfied by granting it the right to build a railway or highway to Batum through the Chorokh River Valley via the Kars-Ardahan-Artvin route and by making Batum itself into an international free state. It was also possible that Lazistan could be placed under nominal Armenian suzerainty as an autonomous district. The Laz, it was stated, had no Georgian sympathies and would prefer to live as independently as possible. This solution would allow Armenia to utilize the carriage roads from Baiburt to the small ports of Rize and Of. In addition, Armenia should also enjoy special transit privileges from Erzerum and Baiburt to Trebizond with guaranteed import-export facilities at the port.²³

The American Connection

Although the United States had withdrawn from the peace process, it nonetheless continued to react to pressure from the pro-Armenia lobby by urging the European Allies to be as generous as possible toward the new Armenian state. On March 24, 1920, after the Senate had refused

²³ *British Documents*, vol. 7, pp. 268-69, 280-82; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 116/15, 132/31, 234/133, 241/140; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 3, pp. 20-35, 53-57.

for a second time to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby called for recognition of the legitimate claims of the Armenian people "and particularly to give them easy and unencumbered access to the sea." He argued that special rights over Lazistan alone would not assure Armenia that essential access. Taking into consideration that Trebizond had always been the terminus of the trade route across Armenia and that Prime Minister Venizelos had expressed on behalf of the Pontic Greeks the preference for a connection with Armenia rather than with Turkey, the United States now urged the European Allies to grant Trebizond to Armenia.²⁴

When the Allied leaders continued their deliberations at the Italian coastal resort of San Remo in April 1920, they replied to Washington that they shared the strong sentiments about creating an independent Armenian state and wished to give it as much territory as might be reasonably claimed for its current needs and future expansion. But because the United States was unable to help in removing the Turkish armies and safeguarding Armenia, it would not be in Armenia's best interest to award the new state too much territory. The maximum would be access to the sea through Batum, the inclusion of Lazistan (east of Trebizond) in Armenia, and transit rights and privileges at the port of Trebizond.²⁵

During the Allied deliberations at San Remo, strong differences between the British Foreign Office and War Office were revealed. Lord Curzon favored the award of Erzerum to Armenia, while the War Office under Winston Churchill was firmly opposed.²⁶ In a clever maneuver to shift responsibility for the consequences of granting either Erzerum or Trebizond to Armenia, Prime Minister David Lloyd George on April 24, 1920 came up with the idea of turning to President Wilson once more and asking him to arbitrate the Armenian boundaries within the four eastern vilayets of Trebizond, Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van. In the forthcoming peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish government would be required to consent in advance to whatever boundary the president of the United States drew within the limits of those

²⁴ United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1936), vol. 3, p. 751.

²⁵ *British Documents*, vol. 8, p. 33.

²⁶ For the deliberations of the San Remo conference relative to Armenia, see Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 3, pp. 71-112.

four provinces. Two days later the Allied leaders approved the text of the invitation to be sent to Wilson.²⁷

Surprisingly, even after it was clear that the United States would do nothing to enforce the terms of the forthcoming peace treaty with Turkey, on May 17 Woodrow Wilson accepted the Allied invitation.²⁸ It then took the State Department several weeks to assemble a team of experts to study the issue and make recommendations.²⁹ Hence, when the Turkish delegates of the sultan's government were summoned to Paris to sign the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920, the wording of Article 89 read:

Turkey and Armenia as well as the other High Contracting Parties agree to submit to the arbitration of the President of the United States of America the question of the frontier to be fixed between Turkey and Armenia in the Vilayets of Erzerum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis, and to accept his decision thereupon, as well as any stipulations he may prescribe as to access for Armenia to the sea, and as to the demilitarisation of any portion of Turkish territory adjacent to the said frontier.³⁰

By that time, the United States team of specialists, headed by William Westermann, were at work to fulfill the president's assignment.³¹ In its report submitted to the State Department on September 28, 1920 (six weeks after the Treaty of Sèvres was signed), the commission explained that it had used geographic, economic, and ethnographic considerations in formulating its recommendations. The territory being assigned to the Armenians was less than half of what they had originally requested, but developments during the past months had made this adjustment necessary. Regarding Armenia's access to the sea, the com-

²⁷ *British Documents*, vol. 8, pp. 145, 156-58, 177-78; *Foreign Relations, 1920*, vol. 3, p. 780.

²⁸ *Foreign Relations, 1920*, vol. 3, p. 783; FO 3761/5107, E527/58, 44, enclosure.

²⁹ *British Documents*, vol. 8, pp. 217-19; *Foreign Relations, 1920*, vol. 3, pp. 779-83.

³⁰ "TREATY OF PEACE between the British Empire and Allied Powers (France, Italy, Japan, Armenia, Belgium, Czecho-Slovakia, Greece, the Hedjaz, Poland, Portugal, Roumania and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State) and Turkey—Sèvres, August 10, 1920," in *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. 113: 1920 (London: H.M.S.O., 1923), pp. 672-73.

³¹ For materials on the boundary commission, see US Archives, RG 59, file.760J.6715.

mission wrote that various possibilities had been considered. The route through the Chorokh River Valley to Batum provided a commercial outlet only for those districts formerly within the Russian Empire and was problematic because of the unstable political conditions there. To the west along the coast of Lazistan were the small harbors of Rize and Of, but they afforded poor anchorage and were so exposed to rough weather that in certain months cargoes could not be landed; they also lacked suitable roads to the hinterland. In keeping with President Wilson's sentiments, therefore, the commission had come to the conclusion that free access to the sea necessitated the inclusion of Trebizond in Armenia, even though the Armenians had no ethnic claims to the city or vilayet. The economic requirement was "absolute and decisive." Because there would be insurmountable difficulties in attempting to build a railway along the old caravan route from the port of Trebizond directly up to Baiburt and Erzerum, the Kharshut River Valley, ending near Tireboli, should be placed in Armenia as the obvious course of the railway from the sea to the Armenian Plateau. The Turkish and Pontic Greek claims to the region "must be regarded as secondary to the economic welfare of the Kurdish, Turkish and Armenian population of the three vilayets of Van, Bitlis and Erzerum." Therefore, Trebizond and Tireboli should be awarded to Armenia and safeguarded through the establishment of a demilitarized zone on the Turkish side of the new boundary.³²

The final boundaries, as drawn by the commission, assigned to Armenia most of the Trebizond and Erzerum vilayets (including the city of Erzerum) as well as two-thirds of the vilayets of Van and Bitlis. The borders of Armenia would begin on the Black Sea between Tireboli and Kerasund (Girason; Giresun) and rise up over the Pontic Mountains to the headwaters of the Kelkit River at a point west of Gumushkhane and east of Shabin-Karahisar. The Kharshut River Valley to the west of Trebizond would therefore fall within the Armenian state, and there would be no further need to consider special transit and port privileges for Armenia, since it would now take in Trebizond and other outlets in Lazistan.³³

³² US Archives, RG 59, 760J.6715/65, "Full Report of the Committee upon the Arbitration of the Boundary between Turkey and Armenia," pp. 1-23. See also Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 28-40.

³³ US Archives, RG 59, 760J.6715/65, pp. 50-64.



Pontus by the Treaty of Sèvres, 1920

The Outcome

Although the Department of State received the report at the end of September 1920, it took two more months for President Wilson to relay the recommendations to the Allied Powers. By that time, it had become clear that the Allies would enforce neither these provisions nor many other sections of the Treaty of Sèvres. It was to be a bitter irony for the Armenians that it was over Trebizond and the small harbors of Lazistan that Mustafa Kemal would receive words of encouragement from Soviet Russia, followed by shipments of Soviet arms and gold to be used against the common imperialist enemies.

In the summer of 1920, a Turkish delegation headed by Bekir Sami Bey arrived in Moscow to seek support from and enter into treaty arrangements with Soviet leaders. Taking advantage of the preliminary work already done by Young Turk fugitives such as Enver and Jemal pashas, Bekir Sami successfully negotiated a preliminary Soviet-Turkish treaty of friendship, which was initialed on August 24, 1920. The first article of the treaty committed each contracting party to refuse to recognize any treaty or obligation forcibly imposed on the other. Russia specifically recognized the Nationalist government at Ankara as the sole representative of Turkey and pledged to reject any international instrument (such as the Treaty of Sèvres) which had not been ratified by that body. The draft treaty, along with secret protocols relating to Soviet military and financial assistance, were carried over the Black Sea from Tuapse to Lazistan by delegation member Ali Kemali Bey, who in mid-September telegraphed the terms to Mustafa Kemal in Ankara and gave assurances that Russia would not intervene in case of Turkish military operations against the existing Armenian republic in Transcaucasia.³⁴

It was only after receiving this welcome news that Kemal ordered General Kiazim Karabekir's 15th Army Corps to advance into the province of Kars and crush the Armenian army as an effective response to the Treaty of Sèvres and everything it represented. During the brief Armeno-Turkish war from late September to November 1920, pro-Armenian groups in Europe called for a naval descent of Allied or Greek forces at Trebizond to halt the Turkish offensive. Although such appeals were heard in the chambers of the League of Nations and ap-

³⁴ See Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 128-66.

peared in certain Western newspapers, no effective action was taken, and the prostrate Armenian government had no choice but to save whatever possible by transferring power to the Soviet order on December 2, 1920, and submitting a few hours later (albeit now illegally because of the change of regime in Erevan) to the Treaty of Alexandropol by which all Armenian claims to Ottoman territories were relinquished and half of Russian Armenia was also given up.

In the agreement to establish Soviet rule in Armenia, the envoys of Soviet Russia pledged to restore the boundary as it had existed prior to the Turkish invasion, meaning that Russia would influence its Turkish friends to relinquish Kars, Ardahan, and Mount Ararat to the new Soviet Armenian republic. All such hopes were dashed a few days later, however, as the Soviet Military Revolutionary Committee that established itself in Erevan repudiated the accord. Mustafa Kemal continued on his triumphant path by playing the Allied Powers and Soviet Russia against each other as a means of gaining the maximum concessions from each side. The Turkish Nationalist successes on the Soviet side were crowned in the Treaty of Moscow (March 1921) and Treaty of Kars (October 1921), and in the West with France relinquishing claims to Cilicia in October 1921 and withdrawing from the region shortly thereafter and with the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, which superseded the Treaty of Sèvres and recognized Turkey's new expanded boundaries in the east. The Armenian Question was neatly shelved at Lausanne, as neither the word "Armenia" nor "Armenian" could be found anywhere in that treaty.³⁵

Thus, Armenian aspirations to a revived, united homeland combining the former Russian and Ottoman provinces of historic Armenia with lifelines to the outside world through Trebizond and other seaports ended in utter disappointment. The pledges, assurances, and commitments of the Allied Powers since the reform plan of 1914 and the onset of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 gave way to considerations of *realpolitik* by 1921. What was more, the compulsory population exchanges between Greece and Turkey in 1922, after three years of conflict and

³⁵ For a discussion of the Turkish invasion, the futile deliberations in the League of Nations, and the partition and Sovietization of the Caucasian Armenian republic, see Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 4, chs. 6-9.

the burning of Smyrna/Izmir, ended all dreams and schemes of Christian recovery in the Pontus. The Pontic Greek population was forcibly removed from its cities, towns, villages, and monasteries and shipped to mainland Greece. Most of the surviving Armenian population, on the other hand, made their way to Abkhazia and the Kuban along the eastern and northern shores of the Black Sea where they would try to recover themselves and find the means to perpetuate their identity and way of life within the ideological and socioeconomic parameters of the Soviet system.